The second letter, dated 1509, is addressed to Luigi Guicciardini (a member of the family of the more famous Francesco) and contains an unusual portrait of a grotesque prostitute, a figure no doubt born of an authentic experience and Machiavelli's vivid imagination.

II

TO LUIGI GUICCIARDINI IN MANTUA

To Signor Luigi Guicciardini
as his dearest brother, in Mantua

Damn it all, Luigi! You see how fortune can bring about in men different results in similar matters. You,

when you have screwed her once, you still get the urge to screw her again—you still want another go at her. But I, having been here several days, going blind crazy without my wife, came across an old woman who washed my shirts; she lives in a house that is practically underground, and the only light that comes in is from the door. I was passing by there one day, and she recognized me and made a big fuss over me; she said that if I wished, she would show me some beautiful shirts that I might want to buy. I believed her—innocent prick that I am! And when I was inside I dimly saw a woman hiding in a corner, pretending to be bashful with a towel over her head and face. The old hag took me by the hand and led me to the woman, saying: "This is the shirt that I want to sell, but I want you to try it on first and pay later." Timid as I am, I was now completely terrified; nevertheless, since I was alone with her and in the dark (the old lady left the house immediately and shut the door), I gave her a good hump. Even though I found her thighs flabby and her cunt watery and her breath stinking a bit, my lust was so desperate that I went ahead and gave it to her anyway! And once I had her, I had the urge to see my merchandise and I took a brand from the fireplace near me and lit a lamp that was above it; and hardly was it lit when the light almost dropped from my hand. My God! The woman was so ugly that I almost dropped dead. The first thing I noticed was a tuft of hair, half white and half black, and although the top of her head was bald, which allowed you to observe a number of lice taking a stroll, nevertheless a few hairs mingled with the whiskers that grew around her face; and on top of her small, wrinkled head there was a scar-burn which made her look as if she had been branded at the market; her eyebrows were full of nits; one eye looked down, the other up, and one was larger than the other. Her tear ducts were full of mucus and her eyelashes plucked; her nose was twisted into a funny shape, the nostrils were full of snot, and one of them was half cut off; her mouth looked like Lorenzo de' Medici's, but it

was twisted on one side and drooled a bit since she had no teeth to keep the saliva in her mouth; her upper lip was covered with a thin but rather long moustache; her chin was long and sharp, pointed up, and from it hung a bit of skin that dangled to her Adam's apple. As I stood there, amazed at this monster, she noticed my surprise and tried to say: "What is the trouble, sir?"; but she could not, since she was a stutterer; and as she opened her mouth there came from it such a stinking breath that my eyes and my nose, the two gateways of the two most outraged senses, found themselves offended by this pestilence; this was such a shock to my stomach that, not being able to bear it, it heaved so much that I vomited all over her. And so, having paid her in the way she deserved, I left. And I swear to God, I don't believe that my lust will return as long as I am in Lombardy. So you can praise God in the hope of enjoying your pleasures again, while I shall be thankful because I have lost the fear of ever again having such an unfortunate experience.

I think that I will have some money left from this trip, and I would like to put it into some small investment when I am back in Florence. I thought about setting up a poultry yard; I need some employee to run it for me. I hear that Piero di Martino is interested; I would like to hear from him if he is able and to have you reply to me. Because if he doesn't want to, I have to find someone else.

Giovanni will give you the news from here. Give Jacopo my regards and remember me to him and don't forget Marco. In Verona on December 9, 1509.

Niccolò Machiavelli

[P.S.] I am awaiting the reply of Gualtieri about my poem.